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Rekindled

by Zainir

Summary

Fareeha Amari and Angela Ziegler haven't seen each other in years and have fallen long out of touch. But now Angela finds herself coming face to face with her old friend.

Angela

Angela opened the dossier again on her tablet. She didn't need to because she knew the entire document by heart now. She'd read it over and over since it had been sent to her, almost unable to believe it. Even knowing what it said, she kept looking at it and reading the name of her patient. *Fareeha Amari.* That was a name she knew well, though she hadn't spoken it in at least five years. And it had been even longer than that since she'd seen the person who held the name. She ran a finger across the name on her screen before she flicked it off again.

Outside the car, the city of Giza passed by in shining glass and steel abutted by a field of ramshackle houses. Green streaks ran through it, spider-webbing out from the river before fading to the tan and browns of the desert sands. The car followed along one of the green strands away from the river that ran through the center of the city. Angela watched people walk and mill about the streets. They thinned as the car approached the Temple of Anubis. It rose up around the Great Pyramids as a walled and towered fortress. An airfield lay inside its walls, along with barracks and even apartments. As they circled above it, she realized more and more it was simply a small town of its own closed off from the rest of the city.

The car set down near the apartment building, the anti-grav thrusters humming thinly as they wound down. A short woman with broad shoulders in a dress uniform stepped from the building to open the door of her car. Inside had been pleasantly cool, but the air that rushed in hit as a wall of heat. She could almost feel her skin tightening. Two men followed out quickly and began to unload Angela's bags from the trunk.

"Doctor Ziegler, my name is Safiya," the woman said in a gentle, accented voice, "We already have your room ready if you'd like to rest after your trip."

Angela stood from the car and looked around, squinting against the bright sun. "I would prefer to see my patient first."

"I must apologize, Doctor," Safiya said with a faintly embarrassed glance down the road toward the tarmac, "but she is not here."

"I'm sorry, I must have misheard. She is gone? Missing?"

"Not missing, Doctor, but gone. She has gone off on her guard rounds for the evening. She was very insistent."

"Insistent? She is an injured patient! How am I supposed to do my job if she isn't here?"

"Again, I must apologize, Doctor Ziegler, but I do--"

She raised a hand to cut Safiya off, shaking her head. The sun was beating down on her like a hot hammer and sweat was already starting to stand out on her neck and arms. Any longer and she'd start to burn. She was far too pale to linger out in the blazing Egyptian sun.

"No, you've no need to apologize. I did not mean to be irritated with you," Angela said while offering her a smile. "It is not your fault. Will you please show me to my room? I'm not accustomed to this heat."

Safiya smiled back and led her inside. The lobby was empty and spartan. A few low chairs, a pair of fake potted trees, and bare white walls with minimal turquoise trim. It felt more like a hospital than most hospitals Angela had been in. The pair entered the elevator and rode it to the top floor in

silence. Angela glanced at Safiya, but the woman kept her gaze fixed on the floor indicator above the door. She fidgeted slightly before Angela looked away. Safiya was nervous, for certain, but Angela wasn't certain why. Could it be something with Fareeha?

The two left the elevator as it stopped and Safiya led Angela down the hall. She opened a door to a surprisingly spacious apartment before turning to offer the doctor the key. Angela's belongings were lined up inside already.

"If there is anything at all you need, Doctor Ziegler, please let me know. You can contact me using the terminal by the couch," Safiya said with a smile. Her fingers touched nervously at her belt.

"You can start by calling me Angela," she said. "And you can tell Miss Amari that I will see her promptly at oh-nine hundred tomorrow."

"Yes, ma'am. Er, Angela. I will let her know," said Safiya. Angela had turned and stepped into her room before she spoke again. "Doctor, I'm sorry. You get this a lot, I know, but I had hoped...maybe you would." She trailed off, a blush darkening her already deep copper skin.

Angela smiled as she looked at the nervous woman. "What is it, Safiya? You can say what's on your mind."

Safiya chewed her lip a moment before she finally spoke, the words tumbling out quickly. "You're such an inspiration. I know Overwatch was supposed to have been a problem and it should be good that it's gone, but I think you did such amazing things and I was hoping I could have your autograph."

Angela blinked a few times in surprise before she let out a surprised laugh. Safiya shrank back and would have turned to leave if Angela hadn't laid a hand on her shoulder. "Of course you can."

Safiya fumbled a picture from her pocket. It was old and folded over with a crease running down the center of it. It was of Angela in her Valkyrie gear, wings spread wide behind her. Angela looked at it for a moment, trying her best to ignore the pang of nostalgia that blossomed in her chest. She pulled a pen from her pocket and signed it quickly for the blushing, smiling soldier.

Angela slipped into her room as soon as she could get Safiya to stop thanking her. It had been awhile since someone had wanted her autograph. She certainly got recognized and noticed most days. She was twice over famous, after all, as a doctor as much as a member of Overwatch. But being recognized for the latter tended to draw more disdain than requests for autographs. It was certainly a nice change of pace.

Alone again, she realized how tired she truly was. It was easy to ignore during moments of irritation, but during the quiet it all settled down on her shoulders. The sudden contact from Helix Security International, the urgent flight halfway across the world. All that to come check on a woman who didn't want to be checked on. Maybe that wasn't fair to Fareeha.

So far as Angela understood, she would be the third doctor to examine the poor woman. No one enjoyed that much professional attention. Then again, if it had been so damned urgent, then they could have at least kept the patient on site. On yet another hand, however, she discovered the bathroom had a magnificently large bathtub. And there was nothing like a warm bath after a frustrating day and a half.

As the tub filled with water, Angela picked up her tablet and flicked through until she found the pictures. Old ones, from long ago when everything was whole and right. All her friends, all her family, all of Overwatch together and smiling. She ignored the regret and longing that welled up,

swiping pictures across the screen until she found the one she wanted. Ana Amari standing tall and strong and looking as fierce as ever despite the pleased grin that was plastered on her face. Her hand rested on the shoulder of a skinny girl standing in front of her.

Fareeha had been just barely a teenager when they first met, so long ago. Angela hadn't been much older. Both had been ambitious to the point of obsessive. She remembered the way Fareeha had argued with her mother. Ana always insisted Fareeha would have a calmer, safer life. Fareeha wanted to be like her mother. No, that wasn't quite right. She wanted to be like all of Overwatch. Strong and brave and protective. She wanted to save the world. When Ana wouldn't bend on the subject, Fareeha had left. Though maybe that had been for the best. It had kept her safe after all.

Angela settled herself in the tub as she began to search for articles on Fareeha. She'd seen bits and pieces over the years, she knew how famous Fareeha had become, but Angela had never pursued the information. It was a painful reminder of everything she had lost. She had thought all of that had been left behind, but it seemed she couldn't truly escape it. She found a report with Fareeha's picture plastered large above it and did a double take.

She looked so much like her mother. The prominent nose, the full lips, the long dark hair, but mainly the eyes. They were bronze and warm despite the cool, detached expression the woman wore. Angela hadn't remembered what color Fareeha's eyes were, but it flooded back to her. The way they looked when Fareeha spoke about her future. The way they would light up and seem to blaze with inner light. The way the tears would shine in them after a fight with her mother. The way they would flit uncertainly to meet Angela's own blue eyes whenever Angela reached to brush those tears from Fareeha's cheeks.

Angela flicked the tablet off quickly and set it aside. She sank down into the tub until the water reached her lips. It had been too long and she had forgotten so much. No, not forgotten, ignored and left it behind. She had to make a life for herself after everything happened, after Overwatch collapsed. She couldn't drag all of the baggage along with her. But maybe she had decided to label far too many things as dead weight. Including a sweet, earnest girl who had always needed a friend more than yet another hero or mentor or surrogate parent. Maybe she could see about making up for lost time, reconnecting even. If things weren't too terribly awkward.

If there was one thing that could make Angela forget about the unbearable heat of Egypt, it was the coffee. Admittedly, the coffee itself was hot, nearly scalding, but it was her life blood. It was dark and strong and drinking it sent electricity through her limbs. It had taken some convincing, but they had sent her a larger pot of it than they normally would with her breakfast. With half of it gone, she finally settled in on her meal. Egg cake, fava beans, and thick, heavy bread. It all sat in a weight in her stomach, like she swallowed a stone, but it was delicious and she certainly wouldn't be hungry.

She was still finishing her coffee when Safiya knocked on the door. Angela took a deep breath before she opened the door and plastered on a smile. It wouldn't do for Safiya to see how nervous she was. Her stomach clenched and twisted around her breakfast as they rode the elevator down. She scolded herself for it mentally. Why should she be so nervous to see Fareeha? She was just another patient. Their past made no difference in that.

Safiya drove her across the compound to the spare examination room they had allowed her for her visit. Their doctor on staff looked at her with a flicker of irritation when she entered the office, but said nothing. Angela couldn't entirely blame him. Her arrival likely felt like a lack of trust from his employers. Angela offered him a small smile before he looked away. Safiya caught the exchange and shrugged before she led Angela to her room.

It was still early, so Angela settled in and prepared. Safiya left her to attend to her other duties but assured Angela she would return if called. The nurses brought the supplies she asked for and Angela arranged them carefully. She wanted to make a good impression. She had worn her nicest professional blouse, blue to match her eyes. Her hair was up in a tidy bun. This would be easy and quick and clean. As ready as she could be, Angela waited. And waited. And waited some more. She paced and stared angrily at the clock. She perked up and sat down at the faintest sound of footsteps, wiping the irritation from her face. It returned fivefold each time no one opened the door. Finally, she punched Safiya's number into the wall terminal.

"Doctor Ziegler? Is everything alright?" came her uncertain voice.

"I seem to be missing my patient."

"What? Did Miss Amari not show?"

"No, she is currently ninety minutes late for our appointment."

"Oh no. Give me a moment, please."

The line buzzed faintly as Safiya switched to a different connection. Angela folded her arms across her chest and tapped her foot on the tile floor. She should not be irritated at poor Safiya, it was not her fault, but how did she not know where this woman was? How could their supposed star employee slip under their radar so easily?

"Doctor Ziegler? Angela? I hate to say this, but…"

"But?"

"But she is in the gym."

Angela ground her teeth together hard to hold back a burst of anger. She was an injured patient, but she blew off her appointment to go work out? "Where is the gym?"

"Give me a few minutes and I will come take you there."

"No, please, it will be quicker to go on my own."

It was down a floor and through the long hall that ran lengthwise through the building. Signs pointed her way at the junctures. Safiya had promised to catch up but Angela didn't intend to wait on her. Her high heels clicked sharply on the floor as she strode through the building. She clutched her tablet tightly in one hand, tapping it against her leg in frustration with every other step. The few people she met stepped aside as she whisked past them. Eyes narrowed, a frown on her lips, brow furrowed, she refused to let her blood cool.

She hesitated just outside the locker room door, taking a few deep breaths before she shoved the door open and stormed in. Fareeha stood in front of an open locker, dressed in only her underclothes and a towel draped over her shoulders. She looked up when the door opened and Angela drew up short. She felt her cheeks grow hot and cursed herself under her breath for not thinking this through. It was a locker room, after all, what did she think Fareeha would be doing?

"Doctor Ziegler, Safiya said I should expect you," said Fareeha. A small smile played on her lips but her eyes were appraising.

Angela cleared her throat and made herself meet the woman's eyes. "You missed your appointment."

“Ah, yes, forgive me,” Fareeha said as she began to dry her hair with her towel. “I lost track of the time.”

“Because you were in the gym.”

“I decided to use the pool today.”

“You’re injured! You can’t just rush off and spend a day working out!”

Fareeha let out a sigh as she turned to fully face Angela. “You are the third doctor they have sent to check on me. If the first two say I am fine, what will be different this time?”

“It’s possible they could have missed something,” Angela said, though she found herself faltering. Her gaze slipped down before she could catch herself. She looked back up quickly. “But I’m a much better doctor. The best doctor you’ll ever find.”

“Is that so?” Fareeha said. She smiled before turning back to her locker. “Then I will meet you in your office in fifteen minutes.”

“Fine,” Angela said sharply. “But if you stand me up again, I will find you and I will do this check up right there. Even if it’s in the yard!”

She walked out of the room, closing the door hard behind her to make sure she had the last word. Along and out of sight, she let out a shaky breath. She had not intended their first meeting in so long to go at all like that. Fareeha had always been a willful child, she remembered. She did what she wanted, or what she could get away with. But she had also been so sweet and kind. And they had been such good friends back then.

It had been a long time though. People changed. She had, so why not Angela? She had excelled in the military, become semi-famous, lead people, gone on dangerous missions. Was it so surprising that she would become brasher and confident? Well, there were other reasons for her to be confident too. Angela rubbed her neck, trying not to blush as she walked back to her office.

The Fareeha she remembered had been a weedy thing, skinny and tall with long limbs she never seemed to know what to do with. She was always going to grow up into a beautiful woman. Her mother was proof enough of that inevitability. Angela hadn’t quite expected the tall, muscular woman with the broad shoulders she found. The flat stomach, the thick and strong thighs, large long-fingered hands, the taut skin over the muscles of her biceps, the way that dark hair framed her...Oh, well, now Angela certainly *was* blushing.

Fareeha

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Fareeha rubbed a hand across her face as she sat down on the locker room bench. Her first time seeing Angela in a decade and that was how it went? An argument. It was not what she wanted or pictured. She had been so nervous about having to talk to Angela, to face her, that she done what she always did to calm her nerves. She exercised.

In truth, she had simply lost track of the time. She swam laps along the pool, thinking of what she was going to say, how she would react. She wondered what Angela would say. They had been close back then, back when they were both slightly gawky teenagers. Angela hadn't stayed that way for long though. The five year age difference between them showed a lot back then as Angela turned into a mature, graceful woman and Fareeha continued on as a clumsy mess.

Even now she felt the difference between them. Fareeha had grown, bulked up, gained muscle. She was thick bodied and rough handed. There was nothing wrong with how she looked, she knew that well, but Angela had always had a way of making her feel awkward. Even just seeing her seemed to bring those feelings back.

She stood and dressed, brushed her hair out, and worked the heavy beads into the strands around her face. Satisfied that she was ready, she set her shoulders and walked to the office Angela had been given for her visit. She knocked on the door exactly when she said she would.

"That was strangely precise," Angela said as she opened the door. "I suppose I can't complain since you did actually show up."

Fareeha offered a smile, trying to hide her nerves. "I would like to apologize, Doctor."

"You can call me Angela, you know," she said as she lead Fareeha into the room. She motioned to the examination chair and the paper crinkled when Fareeha sat down.

"No, I didn't know. You're my doctor and the last time you were Angela," Fareeha trailed off and shrugged.

"It has been awhile, hasn't it?"

"I'm sorry for that" Fareeha said softly.

Angela gave her arm a squeeze. "It wasn't you alone. We both sort of went in our own directions. Now, let's get this over with."

Fareeha removed her shirt, knowing what Angela would want to examine. Angela pulled on her gloves and began, running her hands lightly across Fareeha's arm. She leaned in closer as if she could see something that was invisible to everyone else, tracing a fingertip in a line along Fareeha's wrist and forearm.

After a few moments, she seemed satisfied and lifted Fareeha's arm away from her body. She then began the same intense scrutiny of Fareeha's side, along her lower rib cage. She reached in and gently prodded and poked, making Fareeha squirm.

"Goodness," Angela said with a soft laugh. "Don't tell me that Fareeha Amari is still ticklish after all these years."

“I did not know it was supposed to go away with age,” Fareeha muttered, feeling her cheeks grow hot.

“Don’t worry, I won’t tell anyone,” Angela said with a smile. That smile made Fareeha blush all the darker. “You seem to have healed well after the crash.”

“Yes, I told you I did,” Fareeha said. “No one seems to want to believe me.”

“I think they just want to be sure,” Angela said gently. She was more careful in her poking this time. “You are precious and they want you to be safe.”

“Precious to who, exactly?”

“Your friends, I imagine. And your employers. They must value you a lot to bring in so many doctors for you.”

Fareeha made a face at that. Something about being considered an important asset to Helix Security left a weird taste in her mouth. She was not all that vital. There were others who were as good or better than she was, in her mind. But she doubted they would get the attention she was. A perk of having a famous mother, she supposed.

“What happened, anyway? My file just said you crashed,” Angela said. She grabbed a tablet from nearby and held it up next to Fareeha’s side. She leaned back in and peered at the screen.

Fareeha let out a small, embarrassed laugh. “Ah, well, it is nothing exciting. We were doing a training exercise and one of my thrusters went out.”

“Oh, it’s a wonder you weren’t hurt worse!”

“We were flying low. Evasive maneuver practice. But going so low and fast, I didn’t have time to react. I’m just lucky I hit the field instead of the runway.”

Angela clicked her tongue at that. “Very lucky. Such danger you put yourself in for training.”

“Yes, but it’s better to learn to cope with those situations when it isn’t an emergency,” Fareeha said. She watched Angela, noticing the line of concern that creased her forehead and the way she chewed her bottom lip lightly after she spoke. Fareeha cleared her throat softly, looking away quickly. “It was an accident, what happened. But if I can learn to fall right, to survive, then I am better prepared if it happened in combat.”

“Yes, you’re right, of course,” Angela said as she set aside her tablet. “It is enough to make an old friend worry, though.”

“Is this the same old friend who once tried to develop and fly a set of wings without telling anyone?”

Angela blushed, her cheeks going a bright pink. “You can put your shirt back on now.”

Fareeha complied, waiting quietly as Angela went through whatever data it was that she gathered. She tapped and swiped across her tablet for a few moments, muttering to herself. Finally, she stood and stepped over to her temporary desk.

“Well, the good news is still that most of the injuries have healed just fine,” she announced.

Fareeha slipped from her seat to go stand in front of the desk. “And the bad news is?”

“You still have a number of micro-tears in your muscles and I think the fracture could have been better taken care of,” Angela said, glancing at her notes. “It’s nothing too terrible, but you’re certainly not at one-hundred percent. And all the exercise isn’t helping.”

“Can you fix it?”

“I can. It will be an unusual method, so I’ll need both your permission and the permission from your bosses first.”

“I wish you the best of luck with that.”

Angela raised her brows. “You don’t think they’ll agree?”

“Maybe eventually. But they won’t want to risk things unless they have to. Not to mention trying to meet with them at all will be an effort.”

“I suppose I’ll have to try. A few days out here won’t be too bad.”

“It’ll be like old times,” Fareeha said, smiling.

Angela chewed on her bottom lip. “Fareeha, would you like to go have a drink with me?”

“That would be lovely,” Fareeha said. Her heart fluttered in her chest. “But I don’t drink.”

“Oh! No, of course, I’m sorry! I should have thought--”

“We can still go out. Tonight? Around, ah, eleven tonight?”

“That sounds wonderful,” Angela said as she sat down, “I should see about getting in touch with your bosses, but I will meet you then.”

Fareeha smiled and turned, walking carefully from the room. Her legs felt weak and as she closed the door behind her, she staggered just a little. Her heart pounded and her stomach curled up in knots. Did Angela just ask her on a date? Or was she reading too much into this? Was this just old friends reconnecting? She paused half way down the hall.

“Where am I even going to take her?” she asked aloud.

She groaned and ran her hands over her face. She could have just said tea in Fareeha’s room! Or a walk around the compound! But no, she said acted like she had some interesting, exciting replacement for drinks. She racked her brain for ideas, wandering slowly back to her room. She missed her floor in the elevator three times, standing unmoving when the doors opened only for the car to be called back a different floor. Finally, she had it.

When the doors opened again, she nearly ran headfirst into a poor mechanic who was waiting for the elevator. Fareeha called an apology over her shoulder as she made her way to the stairwell. She climbed the six flights of stairs back to her floor without a pause, not even breathing hard when she dashed down the hallway. Inside her room, she sent a quick message to Angela to make sure she dressed casually tonight before she plunged into her closet. She still wasn’t sure if this was a date, but she was certainly going to look nice. If she could make Angela look at her again like she did in the locker room, it would be a success.

It wasn’t quite what Fareeha had in mind when she said “casual”, but she wasn’t about to complain. Especially not when Angela looked so cute in her periwinkle skirt that billowed around her ankles when she stepped from the elevator. Her blouse was white and buttoned to her neck, but it hugged around her middle and across her breasts and now Fareeha was struggling not to

stare. She offered up an embarrassed smile, feeling awkward as she stood in her t-shirt and leather jacket, jeans and boots.

“You look fantastic,” Fareeha said, almost whispering it.

“You think so? I’m starting to think I overdressed.”

“There are worse things than looking beautiful,” Fareeha blurted. Her eyes widened fractionally and her cheeks went hot as she realized what she said.

Angela just laughed and smiled. “What a flatterer you are. I like your hair like this.” She reached up to touch the braid that hung over Fareeha’s shoulder. “Now it won’t hide your face. So where are we going?”

Fareeha rubbed the back of her neck. “Well, you wanted to go drinking, but since I don’t, I thought we might do the next best thing. There’s a street in the market where all the food stalls open up at night. I thought I could introduce you to some local food.”

“You’re going to feed me?” Angela asked with a broad grin. “That might be better than drinking.”

The pair went outside and climbed in their waiting cab, sitting in anxious silence as they rode. Or maybe it was simply Fareeha who was anxious. She stole glances at Angela, who had her face pressed to the window. The city spread out around them since the driver stuck to the ground roads. Buildings crammed in on either side of them, vying for space and height. Old buildings pressed against new ones, many of them glittering with lights.

They were strung in lines across the streets and around windows, a blinking and shining sea of false stars to match the ones overhead. Fareeha couldn’t recall when they’d started going up, illuminating the night. They must have been from a celebration at some point and then never were taken down. She was always glad for that. They made the city look so alive at night.

The cab stopped a street over from the market. There was no getting through in a car, so they went on foot. Angela slipped her arm through Fareeha’s, holding on to her gently as they walked. She was too busy looking around to notice the way Fareeha tensed or the way her gaze kept returning to look over Angela’s profile, lingering on her lips far more than Fareeha would care to admit. She was more than a little thankful for the constant distractions around them as they got closer to the market.

People packed into the street, one of the wider ones in the area. They jostled past each other, trying to make their way along or up to one of the stalls. The lights here were bright, strings strung along until it felt like it was just before dusk even late into the night. The white glow was speckled with greens and reds and blues here and there. Smoke hung heavy in the air, swirling up and around. It smelled of spices and searing meat and rich sauces.

Fareeha glanced over, expecting Angela to recoil from the noise and press of people and the general overwhelming nature of it all. To her delight, Angela was grinning. She tilted her head back and sniffed at the air, all but bouncing on her toes as she did.

“Oh. Oh, this is wonderful! Where do we start?” Angela asked, raising her voice to be heard over the din.

Laughing, Fareeha pointed. She knew better than to try and shout all night over this mess. Angela gave Fareeha’s arm a squeeze, urging her to lead on so Fareeha pushed her way through the crowd. She wasn’t a particularly tall woman, but she carried enough of a presence that most people gave her space. It worked well for her tonight.

She guided Angela through the packed street to the first stall for falafel. That was always an easy place to start. She wasn't entirely sure what Angela would, or even could, eat. Some spices weren't for everyone. She didn't have to worry about the falafel though, since it vanished almost as soon as Angela got her hands on it.

Fareeha nodded appreciatively at that and Angela smiled back, clearly waiting for more. That was a good sign. Kebab and kofta next. Then kousa mahshi. Then dolma and shawerma and hawawshi and by the time they sat down, away from the crowds, Fareeha felt all the food sitting in her stomach like a rock. A delicious, wonderful rock.

Angela sat next to her on the bench, looking out over one of the canals. Here the city turned green with strips of land dedicated to trees and flowers. At night, it was dimly illuminated by the nearby lights and houses, but not many people came this way. Angela sat nibbling on her basbousa, the cake being the first thing to defy her ability to simply shove it into her mouth.

"This is horrendously sweet," she said.

Fareeha looked over. "Do you not like it?"

"What? No, I love it. It's amazing. It just makes my teeth hurt being even near it," Angela said with a laugh. "Thank you for all this."

"I'm glad you had fun. Better than drinking?"

Angela considered for a moment. "About even, I'd say. Though your company certainly makes it better."

"Oh? How's that?"

"Well, we're friends, aren't we? It's been awhile, I'll admit," Angela said as she looked down at her food. "I regret that we let things end like they did."

Fareeha sighed and rubbed her jaw with the heel of her palm. "Everything just sort of fell apart, didn't it? With what happened to Mother and then Overwatch falling to pieces the way it did. It was difficult for all of us. Seeing you, I often thought about how close you and Mother were. Then I'd think about her and it was difficult to function that way."

"I understand. I do wish I could have done more to help back then."

"I don't know that I would have let you," Fareeha said, offering a small smile. "But you're here now. We can still be friends, right?"

"Of course! I'd be sad if we didn't pick back up," Angela said. She nudged Fareeha lightly with her elbow. "We've got so much to catch up on too."

"Like what?"

Angela's eyes gleamed mischievously in the low light. "Do you still steal people's lab coats and pretend to be a famous surgeon when you think no one's looking?"

Fareeha sputtered in surprise. "One time! I did that one time and you've never let me live it down," she said, looking away sharply and folding her arms over her chest.

Angela burst out into laughter, nearly dropping her basbousa onto the ground. That seemed to make things even funnier for her and her light laughter turned rougher until she finally snorted. Fareeha barked out a laugh at that, which sent Angela into another fit. She clutched her little paper

plate of food in her lap to keep from dropping it as the two of them leaned against each other. Fareeha rubbed the back of her hand against her eyes when they finally quieted.

“I always admired you,” she said softly when she could breathe again.

“Really?”

“Of course. You were so smart and amazing. Everyone went to you for advice, you helped so many people. You were older than me, but still so young to be so talented,” said Fareeha as she leaned back on the bench. “You were so pretty and graceful and I just wanted to be like you.”

“I didn’t realize you felt like that.”

“I was a shy kid back then. How could I tell you any of that?” Fareeha said with a chuckle.

“Shy?” Angela asked, a playful smile on her lips. “I remember it differently. Mostly in that you were loud and everywhere all the time. Quite the amazing brat.”

Fareeha opened her mouth to respond before she closed it in thought. “You thought I was amazing?” she finally said.

That sent Angela into another bout of giggles. When she recovered, the two of them sat quietly and watched the scenery. Palm trees rustled in the breeze, crickets chirped and frogs croaked down along the edge of the canal. Fareeha let out a quiet, content sigh. It had been a good night.

Angela took a small bite from her basbousa. “Did you want some?”

“Oh, that’s alright. I bought it for you.”

Angela tore off a bit and held it up to Fareeha between two slender fingers. “Oh, come on, I should not eat all of this myself.”

Fareeha hesitated, looking at the dessert and then back at Angela, who simply smiled at her. Finally, she swallowed and leaned over, taking the offered bite. Angela’s fingertips brushed her lips and sparks shot through Fareeha’s mind. It must have shown on her face and Angela’s brows furrowed just a little.

“Good?” she asked.

Fareeha nodded as she sat back, trying her best to simply look like she was enjoying the basbousa. “It’s amazing.”

Angela scooted herself closer to Fareeha, popping another bite into her mouth before she held up one for Fareeha. She didn’t hesitate as badly this time, even when Angela held it closer to herself. Fareeha leaned in and took the bite, feeling the same jolt when her lips touched Angela’s fingertips. And again when Angela’s thumb brushed the crumbs away.

Fareeha suddenly realized how close she was sitting to Angela. That she could hear her breathing, soft and quick and almost nervous. She could smell her skin and the soap she had used and the sweet syrup on her lips. Angela’s eyes met Fareeha’s. They were bright and expectant. No, they were hopeful. Fareeha leaned in and kissed her.

Chapter End Notes

I may like researching food a little too much...

Angela

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Electricity ran through Angela like she was a live wire. She tensed and then trembled ever so slightly. Fareeha's lips touched her own. That was really all it was, not so much a kiss as their lips finding each other. It was soft and timid, lingering on and on. Or maybe it had only just started. It was tough to tell in that moment. She breathed in the sweet scent of Fareeha as she pressed in closer. Angela reached up to touch Fareeha's cheeks and found herself suddenly, painfully aware of the sticky syrup on her fingers.

Fareeha didn't seem to mind and the touch seemed to signal something. Her arm wrapped around Angela's waist and pulled her in close. Angela found herself pressed in against Fareeha, feeling the muscles that she had admired earlier. And then Fareeha kissed her properly. The sweet, tender touch was gone, replaced by eager desire. Angela clung to her, warmth flaring up through her chest.

When they drew apart, they sat quietly and breathlessly. Their hands held to each other tightly, unwilling to let go too quickly. Angela slid her hand down Fareeha's arm, feeling her trembling faintly beneath her jacket.

"Fareeha?"

"I always wanted to kiss you back then," she said quietly. Her gaze dropped down to look at Angela's hands. "I used to wonder what it would be like. I'm sorry if I shouldn't have."

Angela cupped Fareeha's cheek in her hand and leaned in close. She kissed her again. It was as soft and sweet as could be, barely more than a brush against her lips. She felt Fareeha's breath against her skin and the way she stilled under her touch.

"I'm glad you did it," Angela whispered as she drew back again.

Fareeha moved her arms from around Angela and shifted away. Even though it had only been a few moments, Angela felt herself missing the feel of those strong hands on her waist. Fareeha rubbed at her neck awkwardly, so Angela didn't push for more.

"It's getting late," Fareeha said after a few moments. "We should go find a cab before we end up having to walk back."

Angela nodded and she slipped her arm through Fareeha's again as they stood. This time she leaned in a little closer, her shoulder rubbing against Fareeha's upper arm as they walked. Fareeha tensed at first but relaxed quickly, even purposefully bumping her hip against Angela's occasionally. But she was quiet for the walk back and most of the ride back, only speaking when Angela pressed her. She held Angela's hand, though, which seemed to be a good sign.

As they stepped into the empty elevator back inside the Temple compound, Angela felt frustrated. She turned to speak, but paused when Fareeha let out a low sigh and gave her hand a squeeze.

"It's a little overwhelming for me," Fareeha said quietly. "When I heard you were coming here, I wanted to be mad about everything that happened. About how we drifted. But I couldn't. I got excited and nervous instead. Then I saw you and it was like it was back then. I felt awkward and I wanted to impress you. I wanted to be close to you. I wanted to kiss you."

Angela stepped closer to her. “So you did.”

“I did. But now I don’t know what to do next,” she said before her cheeks darkened. “I mean, I know what’s next. But with you, I don’t know. I wanted this so bad back then, but now we’re older and I worry I shouldn’t feel this way. Or what if it turns out badly. Or what if it’s great? And then you leave in a week or two. I think that’d be the worst.”

“It doesn’t have to end like that,” Angela said. The elevator doors opened and she gently pulled Fareeha into the hall with her, leading her down to Angela’s room. “I don’t think you should just ignore something like that because it might, possibly, potentially not end exactly the way you want.”

“I suppose.”

“All we did was kiss, Fareeha. It was sweet and nice and I liked it, but it doesn’t mean anything spectacular,” Angela continued, looking up into Fareeha’s eyes. “But wouldn’t you like to find out what it means?”

Fareeha chewed her bottom lip a moment before she nodded. “I would.”

“Then that’s that.”

“I’m on duty most of tomorrow, but maybe we can have tea on my break? I can call you when I’m free.”

“I’d like that,” Angela said. She leaned up to place a soft kiss on Fareeha’s lips, enjoying the way Fareeha grabbed at her waist again. She drew back and smiled after a moment. “Goodnight, Fareeha.”

“Goodnight, Angela. Thank you for tonight,” Fareeha said before she turned and walked back down the hall to the elevators.

Angela watched her go, waiting until she turned the corner before unlocking her apartment door and slipping inside. She slumped her way onto the couch and sprawled out, looking out the window. As the excitement and adrenaline and hormones faded, she felt tired and stiff but content. She hadn’t quite expected the night to go like it had. She wasn’t about to complain, but it was still a surprise.

Fareeha had a point, though. If this worked, if this meant anything, then what happened when her time here was done? Did she simply leave again? Did they struggle to stay close even with a distance between them? Outside, across the compound, the great pyramids were illuminated under sentry lights. Their surfaces were mostly covered in solar panels that glittered in the light. As Angela gazed out at them, she realized she knew exactly what to do.

“This is going to feel a little odd,” Angela said as she adjusted the settings on her portable nanite injector. It was a sort of scaled down version of her Caduceus Staff, meant for less serious injuries.

Fareeha eyed the injector uncertainly. “Odd how?”

“Well, I decided to increase your dosage,” Angela explained as she sat down next to Fareeha. “So instead of just healing your injuries from the crash, it’ll heal anything wrong with you. Well, so far as muscle tears, worn cartilage, any micro-fractures that weren’t picked up in x-rays. You’ll feel pretty bad for about a day and then you’ll feel great.”

“That doesn’t sound too bad,” Fareeha said as she lifted up the side of her shirt.

“You say that now,” Angela said with a chuckle. She pressed the injector to Fareeha’s side and held it for a moment before she drew it back, leaving a small red ring behind. “Just be sure to rest up lots. Drink lots of water, have some snacks. I told your bosses about the side effects already, so hopefully they’ll let you be.”

“I was wondering why I got the day off for a doctor’s appointment.”

“Good. That should do it. I’ll come by this evening and check on you. We can have tea.”

Fareeha smiled at that. It had been four days since their date to the market, but they had managed to have tea together every day. Since Fareeha seemed to have a tea break eight times a day, it made it easy enough for them to find a moment together. Angela had never really been much for it, but tea was quickly becoming her favorite part of the day.

“Why up my dose?” Fareeha asked.

“I want to see you healthy,” Angela said before she leaned over and gave Fareeha a kiss. It seemed inappropriate to do that while she was still technically a patient, sitting in the examination chair, but Angela couldn’t deny it was a little fun too. “Go on to your room before you start getting too tired.”

“Yes, Doctor Ziegler.”

Fareeha stood up and stretched and Angela couldn’t help but admire the physique presented to her. There was a strength and grace present in those muscles that Fareeha didn’t even seem to be aware of. She’d admitted how awkward she felt sometimes, but Angela didn’t see it. And when Fareeha was in her Raptora suit, flying around the compound, there were no words for how incredible she was.

She watched Fareeha leave before leaning back in her chair. That was the first part of her plan done and now there was nothing to do but wait. She made some quick notes, thoughts to bring up when the next step started before making her way back to her room. She read and dozed until it was time to visit Fareeha again.

Angela knocked on Fareeha’s door and waited, listening to the sounds of someone shuffling slowly on the other side. When it finally opened, Fareeha stood bleary eyed and wrapped in a blanket. Her hair frizzed out around her head messily and she blinked several times before she focused on Angela.

“You’ve killed me,” she said.

“Oh no, you poor dear,” Angela said, trying not to laugh. She slipped an arm around Fareeha and led her back into her apartment, setting her on the couch. “I promise you’ll feel better soon. Do you still want some tea?”

Fareeha simply nodded, giving Angela the biggest, saddest puppy eyes she’d ever seen. Angela chuckled softly, pausing to give Fareeha a kiss on the forehead before she set about making the afternoon tea. She’d watched Fareeha do it a few times now, so she knew the process. She poured two cups when it was ready. Plenty of sugar and mint for Fareeha, a tiny amount of sugar for herself.

She offered the cup to Fareeha, who clutched it tightly between her hands and sipped at it. She settled in closer against Angela as soon as Angela sat down, curling up half into a ball inside her blanket. Angela slipped an arm around her shoulders and held her gently.

“Drink your tea and rest,” she said, resting her cheek against Fareeha’s hair. “I’ll wait with you awhile. Until you feel better, if you like.”

“Please?”

Angela nodded. “You’ll have to eat soon too. I bet you haven’t all day and it’s probably making you feel even worse.”

Fareeha didn’t answer but the silence was enough to confirm Angela’s suspicions. She would have to make sure Fareeha ate. For now, though, she let her be. They sipped their tea in silence and curled up together when they were done. Fareeha laid her head on Angela’s shoulder and quickly dozed off.

Angela ran her fingers slowly through Fareeha’s hair. She did feel bad for her. Angela knew how it felt. But she’d be better in the morning and it’d be worth it. She’d feel so much stronger and healthier. With some luck, that would push Angela’s plan along properly.

It took a week before Fareeha’s bosses requested a meeting with Angela. She was disappointed it took so long since she was having trouble finding excuses to extend her stay by that point. Monitoring Fareeha was an excuse that didn’t hold up well when Fareeha was healthier than she’d ever been.

It worked, though. This was what she had been waiting for. When she sat down in front of the two men and one woman that oversaw the HSI installation at Giza, she already knew what they would ask. She smiled politely, pulling up the notes on her tablet.

“Miss Ziegler,” the first man said, “we have some questions concerning Fareeha Amari and the medical treatment you used on her.”

“Oh? Is something the matter?” Angela asked.

“No, quite the opposite,” the woman said. “We put Amari through a few tests after she had recovered. Her scores on them have improved noticeably.”

“And her scores were already impressive,” the second man said.

The first man nodded. “Whatever you did seems to have increased her strength, response time, reflexes.”

“We want to know what exactly it was you did,” said the second man.

“I did exactly what I told you I would do. I gave her a dose of nanites specifically tailored to Fareeha to repair any lingering damage from previous accidents,” Angela said. It was mostly true. The nanites would technically work on anyone.

“Will it wear off?” the woman asked.

“Of course. All it did was repair damage. She’ll reaccumulate the damage through simply being alive and moving. It’ll take awhile, but it’ll come back.”

The three looked at each other a moment before conversing briskly in Arabic. Angela frowned slightly, briefly wishing she had learned the language when she had the chance. She’d picked up a few phrases from Fareeha’s mother, Ana, back in the day but she barely remembered them now.

Not to mention none of them were exactly appropriate.

“Could this be done for other members of our security team?” the woman asked, turning her gaze back to Angela.

There it was. That was what Angela wanted to hear. “Certainly, given some time to meet them and develop what they would need.”

They looked at each other again, the woman and the second man nodding to the first. He looked at Angela and smiled. “Then we would like to offer you a contract with us. Six months, with renewal options. You’ll be paid, supplied housing and food, a proper office to work in, access to much of the facility. You’ll be expected to treat injuries and take care of the security teams. We have a separate doctor on duty for much of the other staff, but you may be called in for more mundane tasks if needed.”

“We can hammer out more of the details, but we’d like to know if you’re interested,” the woman added.

Angela smiled and spread her hands, accepting. “I think we could certainly work something out.”

The four of them talked for another hour before coming to terms they all agreed on. She did her best to hide her excitement. This would give her the time she wanted, that Fareeha wanted. A voice in her head worried it was excessive, that it was too quick a decision, but she dismissed it. If nothing else, she would get to spend a few months with a dear friend, even if nothing came from it.

She hurried back to her apartment once the meeting was done. Punching in Fareeha’s number into the wall console, she left her a message inviting her over for dinner. She knew Fareeha had a long shift that day, but she hoped she wouldn’t be too tired. Angela couldn’t wait to see the look on her face.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for reading! And thank you, everyone who left such nice notes on this story! It was very encouraging to see them and I appreciated every single one.

I hope everyone enjoyed this short bit of fluff. Though it's over, there are more adventures for Fareeha and Angela soon!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!